



THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY

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NEW YORK, NY 10021

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JOSHUA LEDERBERG

PRESIDENT

Dr. Paul F. Brandwein
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Unionville, New York 10988

Dear Dr. Brandwein:

Harry Passow was good enough to pass on to me your extensive comments November 88, and your book on "The Gifted Student as Future Scientist". I certainly respect the data and statistics where they are available; my own observations are quite idiosyncratic.

What is, by contrast with my own experience, notably lacking in your discussion is the role of the student peer group which my recollections of Stuyvesant High School include as vividly as my impressions of the teachers. It is perhaps too easy for me to take the teachers for granted. They were the only ones I had whereas I had a lot of comparison concerning my age peers through elementary school, and the youngsters I would meet in the neighborhood vs. those I knew at school. Now I was not one of those marginally gifted where you worry about an AGCT score of 120 being too stringent; and it was literally true that most of my teachers in high school had only a little to offer me about the cognitive content of science, that I had not already learned on my own, and even less about the atmosphere of doing significant research: I had to wait until college to get that. I was nevertheless most grateful for the encouragement and consideration that I receive on the part of the great majority of my teachers; others were as officious or sometimes burned out as one must realistically have to expect. There was occasionally some of that "ressentience" that Paul Goodman talks about; but happily that was a tiny minority, although those folks could sometimes give me a disproportionate amount of grief. You must not ignore how one bad teacher can undo the good work of 10 excellent ones. But all this is by way of saying that different students do have different needs. I was already very firmly committed to science and what I most needed was professional mentorship of a kind that did not become available to me until after high school.

There are also secular trends you want to attend to -- I wonder if any of that comes out in your data? Right through WWII the scientist was some kind of hero as exemplified in

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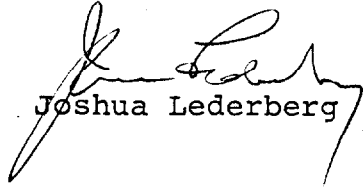
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stories like Arrowsmith. Images of science became far more problematical after that. So peer influences must be even more critical today, in connection with the changes in popular culture; and one may well need corresponding adaptations in education for science.

My comments are surlier than I intend them to be. I profit enormously by a whole range of institutions that gave me a mobility that I could have found nowhere else in the world; and how could I complain about the outcome? (I suppose I am expressing some lingering desire to have had John S. Mills' father to bring out my full intellectual capabilities at an even earlier stage and more fully: for the most part I had to organize my education on my own; and as bright as I was, I suppose I never was able to put an appropriate level of discipline into that enterprise, and perhaps do not to the present day.)

I am very grateful indeed to the small handful of you and your colleagues who have so deeply dedicated yourself to the care of the gifted and the nurturing of school education for science. You are needed ever more urgently than ever; and I hope you will let me know in what ways I can be of service to the mission we share.

Yours sincerely,


Joshua Lederberg

cc: A.H. Passow